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AUTHOR Schecter, Sandra R.; Ramirez, Rafael

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ABSTRACT

A 2-year case study of a well-supported teacher-research group examined the kinds of support teachers need if they are to conduct classroom research. The study focused on the effects of becoming researchers on teachers' views of classroom practice and of themselves as professionals, the levels of knowledge teacher research can provide, and the ways in which teachers working as researchers represent and structure that knowledge in oral and written texts. The group of teacher-researchers comprised 19 kindergarten through college teachers (most had participated in the National Writing Project) representing a broad spectrum with many working in multi-ethnic classrooms and districts. Teaching experience ranged from 2 to 23 years, with the average being 11 years. Data included audio recordings and field notes taken during whole group meetings every 2 weeks and including smaller "response group sessions," all written materials distributed to participants, volunteered pieces from participants' journal entries, and audio recordings of formal interviews with participants at various stages in their research processes. The investigation of the workings of teacher-research groups is still too incipient an enterprise to make definitive pronouncements based on the findings of the study. Instead, findings of the study to date suggest that teacher research: (1) is clearly motivated to point to a theory of classroom practice; (2) can exert pressure on classroom practice to be dynamic, generative, and responsive to students' needs; and (3) has the potential to figure prominently in the evolution of teaching as a profession. (Eighteen references are attached.) (RS)

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Center for the Study of Writing

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A TEACHER-RESEARCH GROUP IN ACTION

Sandra R. Schecter
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University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

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A TEACHER-RESEARCH GROUP IN ACTION

Sandra R. Schecter and Rafael Ramirez
University of California at Berkeley

During the past few years teacher research has become increasingly popular in North America both as a movement and as an emerging field. Most of the activity has taken place within English education circles. In the seventies, Lee Odell (1976; 1979) linked teacher research to writing research by presenting an agenda of writing research issues that presumably could be explored by teachers of writing.

Reports on research conducted by teachers are starting to find their way into print (Bissex & Bullock, 1987; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; "Learning from children," 1988), as are pieces which provide guidance on how teacher research is actually to be carried out (Elliott, 1981; Mohr & MacLean, 1987; Myers, 1985; Nixon, 1981). Also recently appearing are conceptual pieces which attempt to characterize teacher research as a mode of inquiry and to establish its epistemological ground (Applebee, 1987; Burton, 1986; Cazden et al., 1988; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; North, 1987). Some of these pieces draw directly upon existing teacher-research projects, such as those sponsored by Bread Loaf and the Northern Virginia Writing Project. Cazden et al. (1988), for example, examines the foci, topics, and presentational form of 36 teacher-research accounts published in 1987, and speculates on the relationship and the "commute" between teacher research and what she calls "researcher research," with particular regard to writing.

In the literature, many claims are being made about the general efficacy of teacher research and its contributions to both the teaching profession and the individual development of teachers—that teachers involved in research become interested in and read the professional research literature, take leadership roles in their schools and influence decisions about school policy, contribute to professional knowledge on their own accord, become better classroom teachers (Atwell, 1982, 1987; Newkirk & Atwell, 1988; Richmond, 1984). In addition, claims continue to be made by university-based researchers about the epistemological contributions of this type of inquiry (e.g., Applebee, 1987; Cazden et al., 1988).

With all the speculation on the significance of teacher research and with all the design and implementation of teacher-research projects, however, there exists little in the way of formal study of the actual workings of teacher-research groups and the actual effects on teachers of the process of becoming researchers. We believe that both those involved in the teacher-research movement and those concerned with teacher research as a knowledge base would benefit from work that would describe, assess, and explain the effects of groups of teachers engaging in classroom inquiry under varying collaborative conditions. Accordingly, we undertook a two-year-long case study of one such well-supported teacher-research group affiliated with a prestigious U.S. university.

Research Questions and Data Sources

In this study, we were especially concerned with: (a) the kinds of support teachers need if they are to conduct classroom research; (b) the effects of becoming researchers on teachers' views of classroom practice and of themselves as professionals; and (c) the kinds of knowledge teacher research can provide and the ways in which teachers working as researchers represent and structure that knowledge in oral and written text. In the study's first year, we addressed these concerns by focusing primarily on the group "scene," as it

were; in the second year, we focused on a number of participants who represented different perspectives on teacher research within this particular setting. These more detailed portraits were designed to yield "thick" descriptions of individual teachers' thinking about their professional identity and knowledge bases about literacy instruction in the course of ongoing classroom inquiry.

The following data bases were used to address the research questions: audio recordings and field notes taken during whole group meetings every two weeks, including audio recordings and field notes of smaller "response group" sessions during these meetings; all written materials distributed to participants; volunteered pieces from participants' journal entries; audio recordings of formal interviews with participants at various stages in their research processes; audio recordings and/or notes taken during informal conversations with the group facilitator and participants; participants' progress reports, including interim reports and end-of-year research reports; and in-house publications of participants' work.

In the remainder of this paper, we synthesize our findings, relying primarily on data collected during or ensuing from the first year of the study where the focus was on the group as a whole. Before so doing, however, we wish to stress the historically bounded character of the following account: these were the beginnings of what proved to be a dynamic and productive group in which participants addressed both the issues raised in this paper and others arising from the evolving context.

Orientation to "The Group"

The group comprised nineteen kindergarten through college teachers representing a broad spectrum with many working in multi-ethnic classrooms and districts. Seven were elementary school teachers; three taught middle school; six high school; and three taught at the college level. Two of the elementary school teachers were involved in Special Education programs. Of the middle school teachers, two taught Science and one History. All those at the high school and college levels taught English. The range of teaching experience was from two years to twenty-three years, with the average being eleven. Most participants could be described as active members of their profession, belonging to several professional associations, sitting on various advisory boards, and attending conferences in their areas of interest regularly.

Participants found their way to the group through a number of channels. Five had been in the pilot seminar co-sponsored by the National Writing Project and the National Center for the Study of Writing the previous year, and were returning to extend and complete their research projects.[1] Of the remaining fourteen, the largest number (six) were attracted by the Writing Project network, with some reading about the group in a Writing Project Newsletter, and others hearing about it either while participating in one of the Project's summer programs for educators or from a teacher-consultant they knew. Four found out about the program from colleagues at their school sites. Three, enthused about their experiences either in university courses they had taken or with university researchers conducting studies in their schools, sought out the seminar. One had read articles about

[1]The National Writing Project (NWP) is a U.S.-based national program to improve student writing by improving the teaching of writing. In this model of staff development, teachers identified as exemplary by their colleagues meet in five-week summer institutes to exchange successful teaching practices and learn to give demonstrations to groups of peers. Currently there are 160 NWP sites at universities in 45 U.S. states and six foreign countries.

teacher research, and found out how to hook up with a group in her geographical area at a professional conference she had attended.

The seminar met biweekly in a university classroom for approximately three hours, during which time participants engaged in a variety of activities designed to help them formulate and examine context-centered, pedagogical questions about writing. These questions were to emerge from the teachers' interests, observations, readings, and discussions with students and colleagues in the teacher-research group.

The actual seminar was made up of five segments, characterized by the following routines and participation formats, and occurring in the following order:

1. Participants begin to assemble around 5:30 p.m.—placing food items on tables at the front of the room—and socialize for approximately twenty minutes as other colleagues enter. They chat about events at the school site or district level, or in their personal lives.

2. The group leader begins the seminar by making and soliciting announcements about recently past and/or upcoming events related to teacher research or other professional activities for teachers. When appropriate, during this segment the group leader also orchestrates plans for individual or group participation in future activities. The group leader's personal anecdotes—a misadventure on a canoe trip, experiences while facilitating writing-across-the-curriculum workshops for teachers in isolated locales—and jokes with local flavor ("Any food above Colonel Sanders is good in Peoria") pepper this warm-up segment.

3. One or several main activities ensue, each generally comprised of a number of parts, separated by shifts in discourse routine and/or participation format. An example of one activity: a) an invited guest presents on a prepared topic; b) toward the end of or following the presentation, individuals ask opinion and clarification questions to which the invited guest responds; c) after the guest leaves, a whole-group discussion takes place on issues related to the presentation. A second example: a) the group leader distributes an article or paper for participants to read during the seminar; b) a period of individual reading follows; c) when it feels right to the group leader, participants are reconvened into the whole group or smaller response groups for discussion of issues arising from the reading. (Since there is no syllabus or schedule of events for the seminar, generally participants are not aware of the agenda for the main activity before it begins).

4. A break of ten to fifteen minutes follows the main activity. During this period participants chat informally—sometimes about issues related to their research—and partake of the food and drink on the tables in the front of the room (although individuals feel free to snack during the other segments as well).

5. The group leader reconvenes the group and either introduces another main activity or asks participants to get into their smaller response groups. These contain four or five permanently assigned participants, one of whom is designated "group leader" at the start of the academic year. Response group members share the contents of their most recent journal entries and/or discuss issues currently important in shaping their thinking about their research.

According to Mike, the group's facilitator, the format for the group "came from the Marian Mohr model," which he wanted to "experiment with to see what works and what

doesn't work."[2] In this regard, it is important to clarify that although many of the features of the group we observed did, in fact, correspond to those of "the Marian Mohr model"—the group was teacher-led, response groups were assigned (rather than self-selected or rotational), participants were asked to maintain journals—the group differed from the Mohr/MacLean group in several respects, perhaps the most significant being the absence of a syllabus showing a planned sequence of readings, assignments, and topics for discussion.

Mike perceived his primary business-at-hand to be guiding participants to an appreciation of the value of engaging in informed classroom observation and developing their thinking about their teaching practices by sharing their reflections with colleagues both orally and in writing. This goal, he believed, was most easily achieved by bringing teachers together to exchange ideas in a "nonthreatening and nonintimidating" support-group environment. Such an environment, he further believed, was best created by being circumspect with respect to demands made on participants' extra-seminar time, flexible about expectations concerning task completion and deadlines, and accepting of individual differences in workstyle.

In pep talks Mike would remind the group frequently that "the process is more important than the product." "Just remember, think process," he would exhort. This concept, assumed as a basic working philosophy (although not necessarily shared) by all group members, was invoked frequently in participants' journal entries and contributions at group meetings.

Findings

1. The kinds of support teachers need to conduct classroom research.

First, we would emphasize that because we intended this research to be useful both to the teacher-research group with which we were collaborating and to others forming across the country, we wanted to be sure to tap all available resources that could provide information about the kinds of collaborative conditions that teachers need to engage in informed observation. Therefore, in addition to making note of participants' contributions on this topic in the seminars, we also elicited information using a variety of interview techniques. We asked "open" questions permitting participants to ruminate, and on different occasions we also asked "closed" questions touching on as many areas as we could identify—time and scheduling, money, institutional and collegial support at the district and site levels, the structure and content of the seminar itself.

Although participants discussed their needs for support in all of the above areas, their two major concerns were: 1) "being able to find a block of *time* to sit down and concentrate and do some writing," in the words of one teacher-researcher; and 2) the *structure and content of the group meetings*. This latter concern deserves additional comment, since in the first year interviews over half of participants' talk addressed this topic.

This large volume of talk is at least partially explainable by the tendency of participants' contributions to be the expression of debates they seemed to be carrying on internally, with the *same* participant elucidating the structural attributes of the seminar alternately as both strengths and weaknesses. In a typical conversation, for example, one

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[2]M. Mohr is co-director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project and co-author with M. MacLean of *Working Together: A Guide for Teacher-Research* (1989).

participant complained that the group "needs more structure ... like handing something in ... a sort of syllabus ... maybe some speakers a little earlier"; then, reversing direction, she said, seeming to remind herself, that a "gentle approach is good" and that "one of the reasons it works is because you're not getting all overwhelmed."[3] In the same vein, a second participant, after expressing her preference for "more formal deadlines" so that "we would have felt accountable," does an about face: "On the other hand I like the flexibility too." A third felt he could have used more formal feedback from the group leader and his response group, but in the end was not disappointed with the experience: "This was something that was mine."

One participant who by the end of the first year had not yet settled on a research topic, reminisced about how happy and productive he had felt doing a "mini-research project" in a class on qualitative research he took with a local university professor. Although the class was "open-ended" with respect to the type of research project he could undertake, it was also "a lot more structured" than the teacher-research group, he explained. There were assigned readings representing "models of different types of studies," firm deadlines for oral reports and submission of written work, and many opportunities for feedback from the instructor. Turning then to his experience in the teacher research group, the participant reported that at first "the relaxed attitude about getting going with your project appealed to me ... I've never been in a situation where you could just take your time like that ... it excited me and I thought that's great, no pressure, just keep the journal ... I thought you know whatever comes out of this I will really own. Will really be mine and I'll be you know proud of it. And happier about it." Eventually, though, he had to admit to himself that "I didn't really respond that well to that ... I wasn't as productive as I had been" [in the course with the university professor]. Nonetheless, he concluded his fifteen-minute-long monologue: "I realize that's just part of the process."

More than a few participants used imagery of disorientation in describing their experiences "generating a research agenda from scratch," in the words of one researcher. Much of the time, one participant said, she felt the group was "operating in the dark"; later in the same interview she described her sense of being "in a fog." "I have lots of questions and need some direction," another participant wrote in her journal midway through the first year.

Many participants used the phrases "more structure" and "more organization" when referring to their perceived needs for: a syllabus with a logical progression; more judicious use of seminar time, including more focused discussions; and regular feedback from the group leader and their response group. They also talked about the need for the seminar to be "more formal," referring to features such as nonnegotiable deadlines for oral presentations and submission of written work, and written response to journal entries and drafts from the group facilitator and from Schecter who, in addition to conducting the meta-study, participated actively in the group.

Deadlines were especially important to participants because these milestones, they felt, "catalyzed" their thinking and led to "breakthroughs" in their research. One teacher-researcher reported in an end-of-year interview that the framing of her research problem and data-collection techniques (including ideas for more efficacious use of her journal entries as "field notes") "started to jell only in the last couple of weeks" before the deadline for her June report.

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[3]To protect the anonymity of participants in the teacher research group, sex pronouns are randomly assigned to individual participants.

Before leaving this topic, we should mention that these findings were unanticipated. Most of the conceptual pieces we had read in preparation for this study focused on released time, financial compensation, and the recalcitrance of the university research community vis-a-vis teacher inquiry when discussing the kinds of conditions teachers perceived as relevant to their productive engagement in classroom inquiry. We were, therefore, surprised to learn that the nature of the group process was as important an element as it turned out to be for the teachers involved in our study.

2. Effects on teachers' views of classroom practice and themselves as professionals.

In conjunction with the findings on these issues, it is important to note that although participants' expectations varied—reflecting and sharing ideas with colleagues in a supportive environment, becoming familiar with classroom-oriented research methods that could be used to enhance teaching, using externally imposed timelines to keep to a writing schedule, association with the prestige of the university—comments describing these various expectations relate in some way or other to the theme of professional self-growth:

> "Forcing me to reflect on what I'm doing in my classroom."
>
> "I'd like to connect with other teachers to generate some fresh ideas."
>
> "To become a better teacher of AP English; to have a further sense of focus in all my classes; to convince my district there are additional ways for teachers to improve...."
>
> "I really love the connection with [the university]."
>
> "I'd love to be able to work for a Ph.D. So this was the closest thing...."
>
> "I've been trying for years to make the time to keep a journal so I could reflect on each day's experience."
>
> "One of the main reasons I joined the teacher-research project was because I needed that over my head to write."
>
> "I'm interested in being able to try to explore a process ... to learn the process of observing something and writing it up in some kind of way."

At the end of the first year, participants reported many positive effects of their experience on both their classroom practices and their views of themselves as professionals. In their responses to the open-ended question, "Has the experience affected you as a teacher in any way?" they distinguished being part of the group process from the individual experience of engaging in a research project, and in the final analysis they had positive outcomes to report of both.

With regard to the group experience, almost all the participants appreciated the support function served by the group and the "collegiality" of their peers: "It's nice to come to a group that understood what you were going through." Related to this theme were comments about the role of the group in countering teacher isolation, a problem participants previously saw as endemic to their profession.

Participants also appreciated the opportunities for reflection provided by the biweekly meetings and commended their colleagues as "great resources for ideas."

Although a few would have preferred not to have had response groups and most would have preferred to have had some say about the composition of these smaller groups, most cited the response groups as the most important aspect of the teacher research program: "My response group is essential for me to keep on top of my project. Journal sharing, discussions, and networking have been important components of what we do in our group."

One participant summed up his experience in the teacher-research seminar as follows: "I love the sharing of problems, successes, goals, that I get with other teachers in the program. The log groups, especially, provide this, as well as more direct feedback in response to my particular difficulties. I love the energy I get from seeing/hearing other teachers' projects. These meetings make me think." Several participants, expanding on this last observation, described the intellectual momentum provided by the collaborative experience: "This class causes me to think about what I'm doing much more than I probably would otherwise ... I usually have my brainy breakthroughs in thinking when I'm having [this] class. Or right after I've had a class. More than on my own."

About their individual research odysseys, participants were almost unanimous in testifying that engaging in their own classroom-based research improved their teaching performances by making them more reflective practitioners. One participant reported that "collecting data makes me ask good questions of kids who give me good answers, answers that help me improve as a teacher." "Teachers need to be researchers so that they get to look at what they are doing in the classroom," one participant concluded, turning the issue on its head. This moral imperative for the profession is articulated by another participant as follows: "Until teachers start reading research, doing research, they won't be a profession. If they're grounded on lesson plans, that's where they're going to stay."

With regard to participants' claims that engaging in informed observation led to changes in their classroom practices, we understand that what people say and what they do may not necessarily constitute one and the same thing. Nonetheless, we find participants' testimonies revealing for what they tell us about the operative assumptions underlying this particular teacher-research group model. Like the expectations they articulated at the beginning of their research odysseys, participants' year-end testimonies about their changed behaviors are consistent with Rogerian concepts related to the goal of self-actualization. "What it all boils down to," one participant summed up, "is looking at yourself as a teacher. I became a better teacher because of doing the teacher research."

Before moving on, we want to present one "hard" piece of evidence testifying to participants' professional evolutions, and that is the interest that they appear to have developed in the work of other researchers—including university-based researchers—as the seminar progressed. Although most participants did not extensively review the literature related to their studies, all but two who submitted pieces to the in-house publication of "Working Papers" ensuing from this first year of the project read and appropriately cited other research in their respective areas. However, they did not begin their research by searching out this literature; rather, they consulted these works after they had determined either on their own or in consultation with a colleague that familiarity with these pieces might either stimulate their thinking at a crucial stage in their projects or help to "validate [their] own perceptions."

3. Teacher-researcher knowledge.

In conjunction with our findings on this topic, some background information about participants' day-to-day experiences of being principal investigators on research projects is in order. First, reassurances about process being more important than product

notwithstanding, many participants expressed concern about producing "real research," as one teacher-researcher put it—research valuable both to the teaching profession and to the area of study. One participant wrote in his journal: "I would like to contribute to the field in a significant manner." A second, struggling with the articulation of her research problem, anguished: "Why would anyone care?" A third, again in a journal entry, emphasized her concern with the final product: "I have to admit the prospect of *publishing* was a *big lure* for me! I published one article once ... and the euphoria lasted six months to a year."

Also, after an initial show of bravado and in contradiction to the opinions expressed in some "think pieces" to the effect that teachers already have all the expertise they need and can speak with authority from their classroom experiences, many participants expressed concern throughout with issues of "method," "proof," "truth," and "error" both as abstract concepts and as applied to their own work. "I'm hyper over whether I'm doing everything the right way," one participant fretted. Similarly, another reported on her state of progress: "I'm ready to make it tighter. As a scientist I don't think it's super legit yet." A third participant concluded near the end of the first year that "the secret" of her study was classroom talk, but doubted she had the "expertise" to undertake the indicated analyses; nor was she persuaded by the group leader's counsel to "go ahead and write, background or no." Several participants felt that their studies lacked sufficient rigor because they did not use sophisticated quantitative methods as did, they believed, university-based scholars.

As for the studies themselves: all eleven of the Working Papers included in the in-house publication treat classroom practice. All contain an explicit or implicit evaluative component, as the researchers sought to address the question, "What works in the classroom?" and to explain the relative success of different classroom practices. When the studies are categorized according to "overall focus" and "specific topic" (after Cazden et al., 1988), certain tendencies become evident. Eight of the papers test the effects of a specific pedagogical practice, while three have a more open-ended descriptive focus. Student writing is the explicit topic in nine of the papers, although the topic of writing is peripherally present in the other two. Considering foci and topics together, it becomes clear that nearly all of the researchers wanted to be able to assess closely the effects of specific pedagogical practices on students' writing.

With respect to rhetorical organization and the use of stylistic conventions, ten of the pieces included in the collection contain elements of narrative. Five are thoroughly narrative in their organization; of the remaining six, five are pastiche-like in organization, with elements of narrative combining with elements of formal—i.e., academic—and informal expository writing; one employs conventional academic exposition throughout. Interestingly, in six of the Working Papers containing narrative components, one finds two distinct narrative threads, the first telling the story of the research's progress—the road travelled by a student or a group of students in response to specific pedagogic interventions—and the second recounting the personal learning odyssey of the researcher her- or himself.

Now for the historic dichotomy between "teacher-researcher knowledge" and "university-researcher knowledge," to use two expedient phrases. Contrary to what several of the participants may have believed, the attributes distinguishing the group's Working Papers from articles found in academic journals have little relationship to mastery of elaborate experimental methodology. We found, however, several important differences.

First, in their write-ups university-based researchers must make a case that they are contributing to an established body of knowledge. To be able to do this they must demonstrate that they exercise deliberate control over the intellectual history of an issue by

citing and synthesizing the relevant literature. The group of teacher-researchers we studied did not feel similarly constrained. Although, as previously mentioned, all but two of the eleven Working Papers authors cited sources that had been useful to them as they sought to make sense of the phenomena they had observed, only one situated her problem within an established field of inquiry and none undertook or claimed to undertake systematic reviews of the existent research on their topics.

Second, in teacher research there exist as yet no recognized norms for reliability/validity judgments. Again with reference to the in-house publication, many (but not all) of the researchers considered personal experience sufficient grounds for asserting their claims. Others, however, in the face of this absence of norms, indicated that they felt the need for extreme epistemological caution in making claims about their data by using various strategies of triangulation to test their hypotheses. Conversely, established norms for reliability/validity do exist within the university-researcher community. In this latter research context, experience is not considered a valid foundation (although it may be, in fact, the actual foundation) for the assertion of claims, and findings must be cast within a tradition of inquiry that admits designated kinds of data as evidence.

Third, not all of the teacher-researcher pieces we reviewed addressed a problem. The three which did not all asserted certain teaching methods to be successful, and went on to describe how these teaching methods are implemented as well as some positive outcomes of these methods as evidenced by either student performance or feedback. This is not to say that these three were the only pieces concerned with the benefits of certain classroom practices; as stated earlier, all the studies attempted to assess and draw conclusions with respect to effective classroom practice. It is to say, however, that for a minority of participants in our study research could be conducted outside of an articulated problem statement leading to a plan of action requiring consideration of at least two competing hypotheses concerning the benefits of the practices in question. Conversely, to be taken seriously, university research—in the natural and social sciences, at any rate, although not necessarily in the humanities—must contain a problem statement in which the researcher raises questions. This problem statement must be followed at some point by a plan of action in which the researcher demonstrates good faith in devising strategies for addressing these questions. Depending on the discipline and orientation, this good faith can be demonstrated in a variety of ways, but must entail consideration of competing interpretations of the data. (This is not to say that all university researchers embrace and elucidate the full complexity of the issues arising from their research, or even act in "good faith" in attempting to do so, only that they feel constrained to demonstrate that they are behaving in the manner described.)

Before leaving this topic, we should mention that in reports of preliminary findings from this study, we mentioned an additional dimension of difference between teacher research and university research, and that is the degree to which standardized rhetorical conventions are used. We noted that while university-based researchers (to be accepted into the academic fold, as it were) must demonstrate familiarity with the discourse conventions used by other researchers in their areas to frame the pertinent discussions, the teacher-researchers we studied did not feel similarly constrained. We arrived at this conclusion following analyses of oral and written accounts provided by group participants during the study's first year. In these accounts, we found rhetorical formats and stylistic conventions to vary across teacher-researchers and within similar topics. This finding did not surprise us; teacher research being relatively new to the American scene, we did not expect to see a pattern with respect to use of standardized stylistic conventions.

As time progressed, however, the group pressure in favor of the use of the double narrative, that is, a narrative of the research process interwoven with a narrative of self—in

public forums grew stronger. Thus, for example, in an oral presentation on her project to the entire group early on in the second year, one researcher ran into trouble when she attempted to describe and explain in relatively detached language the manner in which the learning of a child previously labeled "disabled" came to thrive when he was removed from the participant's own classroom and placed in a regular classroom with a "whole language" teacher. Demanding to know "But where are you in the research process?" participants refused to accept the researcher's account because it lacked reflexive testimony on the role of the self in the research process and the impact of the research process on the self. What role did her expertise in recognizing when and how to act in the better interests of the child play? they demanded to know. What about the support function she served for the other teacher? In what ways did her own consciousness evolve as a result of engagement in the research process? It now appears to us that tacit valuation by the group of the use of certain expressive forms may well have influenced the rhetorical choices of authors of the pieces included in the in-house publication. However, at this point we cannot draw any confident conclusions regarding the existence of constraints governing the use of conventionalized rhetorical forms, and we look forward to reading more accounts of teacher-based classroom inquiry with a view to teacher research as an emergent genre.

Discussion

The investigation of the workings of teacher research groups is still too incipient an enterprise for us to be able to, or even wish to, make definitive pronouncements based on the findings of our study. Instead, we prefer to discuss the potential benefits of this form of collaborative activity as suggested by the words and writing of participants in our project.

First, teacher research is clearly motivated to point us to a theory of practice, to a body of knowledge contributed by teachers that seeks to identify and define what actually and beneficially goes on in classrooms. Second, teacher research can exert pressure on that body of knowledge to be dynamic, generative, and responsive to the needs of students, as teachers engage with, challenge, and act upon their evolving understandings of subject matter, educational practice, and professional values through their daily classroom interactions. Third, beyond its epistemological contributions, teacher research has the potential to figure importantly in the evolution—shaping, in the strong hypothesis—of teaching as a profession. For a number of participants in our study, in fact, who did not seek to publish their work in the in-house anthology or elsewhere, professional development proved the primary interest of the enterprise. But here we must be cautious to safeguard the notion of "professionalization" from stereotypic top-down representations of "staff development" in the form of programs instituted by school district officials or university types which teachers have no role in shaping. Participants in our group were unanimously firm on this point: teacher research has a contribution to make to the profession of teaching when and only when it is embedded in an institutional context where teachers are "treated with respect" and maintain "autonomy over the reflexive process."

We would also like to take this opportunity to encourage other meta-studies of teacher-research groups. We see two advantages to these studies. First, because close observation of the workings of such groups can reveal the significance and value of teacher research as perceived by teachers, it can also help pivotal actors in teacher-research projects to take appropriate actions. In our project, for example, the open relationship that existed between the various collaborators permitted the communication of preliminary findings in time to modify certain structural elements of the group environment for the subsequent year. As well, although in the maturation of this particular group professional self-actualization remained a principal motivation for participation, with critical awareness of

this dynamic participants were able to express and act on their increasingly more strongly felt need to shift the goal orientation over somewhat to positive changes in their students' learning experiences.

Second, the study of a variety of teacher-research groups that differ in configuration and goals can provide a needed understanding of the spectra along which different groups may co-exist and of the outcomes yielded by various combinations of points along these spectra. An appreciation of such spectra could generate useful hypotheses about, for example, how it is that the teacher-researchers in the project we have described undertook independent reviews of the literature relevant to their studies later in the research process than other groups working within a more traditional university-based framework. If the jumping off point is the teacher's experience—as was the case with this group—there is no need to read at the outset; if, on the other hand, the jumping off point is a body of academic knowledge, obviously it is in one's interest to become familiar with this corpus as soon as possible.

Similarly, it is understandable that—notwithstanding the increasingly sensitive and profound insights participants revealed about the learning strategies of their students—the teacher-researchers we worked with articulated the perceived benefits of teacher research primarily in terms of their own professional growth. The goal orientation of this group was self; through teachers' efforts to improve themselves as professionals, participants believed, students will learn better.

To test these and other similar working hypotheses, we could begin to construct and then refine a list of spectra along which different teacher-research groups may be situated. The following examples are but a few which might be explored.

degree of imposed structure

unstructured----------highly circumscribed

point of departure

teacher's experience----------body of research

goal orientation

self----------other

goals

teachers taking charge----------students learning better

audience

self----------educational community

Thus, by studying groups with different configurations—different points of origin, different priorities, different structural features, and different directions—and hearing the voices of other teacher-researchers, we will come to better understand the range of contributions this form of intellectual practice can make to our notions of teaching as a profession and to our knowledge of the personal and environmental elements that influence learners' engagement with literacy.

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